



CITY OF RALEIGH PUBLIC AFFAIRS DEPARTMENT

News Release

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Dramatist Ian Finley Selected 2012 Piedmont Laureate

Renowned Raleigh dramatist Ian Finley has been selected as the region's 2012 Piedmont Laureate. Mr. Finley will be introduced as the new laureate at the State of Arts and Culture in Wake County meeting on Thursday, Jan. 12 at the North Carolina Museum of Art's East Building auditorium. The meeting, sponsored by the United Arts Council of Raleigh & Wake County, begins at 8 a.m. and is free and open to the public.

The Piedmont Laureate program is dedicated to building a literary bridge for residents to come together and celebrate the art of writing. Co-sponsored by the City of Raleigh Arts Commission, Alamance County Arts Council, Durham Arts Council, Orange County Arts Commission and United Arts Council of Raleigh & Wake County, the program's mission is to "promote awareness and heighten appreciation for excellence in the literary arts throughout the Piedmont region." The program focuses on a different literary form each year (poetry in 2009, novels in 2010, creative non-fiction in 2011 and dramatist/screenwriter in 2012).

"Ian Finley loves the theater. That love radiates outward and is contagious," said Burning Coal Theatre Artistic Director Jerome Davis. "It is how he manages to win the hearts of all his students and it's why his writing registers with his readers as genuine. He is an integral part of our theater, and his energy and passion are equally important parts of my life as an artist and as a citizen."

For being named the Piedmont Laureate, Mr. Finley will receive an honorarium of \$6,500 and serve for one year. His duties will include presenting public readings and workshops, participating at select public functions and creating at least one original activity to expand appreciation of the work of dramatists in literature. A schedule of the Laureate's 2012 activities will be posted in January on the sponsoring agency websites and on the Piedmont Laureate website at www.piedmontlaureate.com.

Mr. Finley studied theater at the University of Utah and received a master's degree in dramatic writing from the Tisch School of the Arts at New York University. His work during that time focused on drama as a means of dialogue. Most notable was "The Nature of the Nautilus," commissioned for a group of deaf actors to perform in sign language. The work dealt with the controversy of cochlear implants (surgically implanted devices that provide a sense of sound to the deaf and hard of hearing). Following productions at the University of Utah and the Kennedy Center American College Theater gathering in Hayward, Calif. "The Nature of the Nautilus" was awarded the 2002 Jean Kennedy Smith Award for a play with a theme addressing disability.

Mr. Finley moved to Raleigh seven years ago after graduate school. Working primarily with Burning Coal Theatre Company, he has brought more than 70 different stories from the area's history to life on stage through collaborations with Historic Oakwood Cemetery, the Mordecai House, Raleigh City Museum, the Town of Cary and other North Carolina organizations. He focuses on the realization that relevant, effective drama is necessarily connected to place. His historical plays combine multiple stories within a tapestry structure and often performed in actual locations relevant to the narrative. They are a unique addition to the area's cultural life.

“As a teacher, I have encountered diverse attitudes toward great literature: that it is a luxury to enjoy, a chore to endure, or an obstacle to fear,” Mr. Finley said. “It is none of these.

“Instead, it is a fundamental tool. It is the crowbar we use to escape the prison of the self and understand others. It is the hammer that builds up communities and the bridges between them. It is the light that gives us direction and hope. Literature is not for ‘someone else.’ It can, and must, empower all of us, no matter our background or current position. This is the belief that motivates me, and which I hope to promote as Piedmont Laureate,” he added.

Currently, Mr. Finley is director of education at Burning Coal Theatre Company. He heads Burning Coal's WillPower residency programs, its Summer Theatre Conservatories, and many other programs.

Applications for the Piedmont Laureate position were received from a four-county area. A selection committee reviewed all the applications and made recommendations. The selection committee was comprised of Allison Bergman, assistant director, University Theatre at North Carolina State University; Howard Craft, a Durham playwright and poet; Mark Perry, Dramatic Art Department lecturer at the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill; and Catherine Rodgers, theatre director at Meredith College, as well as sponsoring agency representatives,

For more information about the Piedmont Laureate program, visit www.piedmontlaureate.com; or contact Belva Parker, arts program coordinator of the City of Raleigh Arts Commission, at belva.parker@raleighnc.gov or 996-3610. Interested parties may also call any of the other sponsor agencies of the program to obtain information.

{**NOTE:** Attached is a photo of 2012 Piedmont Laureate Ian Finley.}